

for or against the adoption of the new constitution. This privilege I trust will be accorded to us.

Mr. RIDGELY. Will the gentleman allow me to ask him a question? I did not distinctly understand the answer you gave to the gentleman from Howard (Mr. Sands.) I would be glad to know whether you would approve a peace which would recognize the independence of the southern confederacy?

Mr. DENT. I would. I do not know that I would recognize them by the limits which they claim, but by some lines which might be agreed upon by commissioners appointed to negotiate for that purpose.

Mr. SANDS. I should like to ask the gentleman one other question before he sits down. Would he include Maryland in those limits to which he refers?

Mr. DENT. If the majority of the citizens of Maryland were in favor of it, I should be for including Maryland. If they were against it, I should be influenced by the voice of the majority of the citizens of Maryland, whether we should adhere to our present position, or take a new position; because I should regard the Union as having been dissolved, and each State as resolved into its original position of independent sovereignty; notwithstanding the assertion that there would be no States were the Union destroyed. I entertain the opposite opinion; that is, that if the Union were destroyed, the States would be alive and would occupy the same position they held before there was any Union—each being an independent sovereign State.

Mr. NEALEY. Will the gentleman allow me to ask him another question? If the proposition were placed before him as one of the people of Maryland, whether the State should go with the southern portion of the country, or remain with the northern portion of the country, which way would he vote?

Mr. DENT. I will answer the gentleman frankly. I would prefer that Maryland should be associated with the southern States. I have no hesitation in answering. (The half-hour having expired, the gentleman yielded the floor.)

Mr. BILLINGSLEY. I would suggest to the convention that inasmuch as the gentleman from St. Mary's (Mr. Dent) has had, from circumstances over which he has had no control, no opportunity to express his sentiments freely and unreservedly upon the various topics which have engaged the attention of this convention, and as members seem anxious and even solicitous to obtain his views upon the prominent questions of the day, that you will as a matter of courtesy allow him to proceed. It is now a late hour, and we do not expect to conclude this discussion or to take a vote upon the amendment now before us; and as I know it has been his wish to be here, but that circumstances he could not control have rendered his absence unavoidable, I think you

ought to depart a little from the established rule of the convention, in order to enable him to proceed.

Mr. DENT. I am very much obliged to my colleague for making the request of the convention, but I do not desire to continue.

Mr. BILLINGSLEY. I know that it is the gentleman's extreme modesty which causes him to decline, and I move that he have leave to proceed.

The PRESIDENT. For what time?

Mr. DENT. I hope the gentleman will withdraw the motion.

Mr. BILLINGSLEY. I move that he have leave to proceed for twenty minutes.

Mr. STOCKBRIDGE. To discuss the subject before the convention, or for general discussion?

Mr. DENT. I would prefer that the motion should be withdrawn. I have debated the question before the convention, and the convention has been indulgent and listened to me. I do not desire at present to occupy any more time.

Mr. BILLINGSLEY. Well, sir; I withdraw the motion.

Mr. BELT. I will consult the pleasure of the convention, either to proceed now or give way to a motion to adjourn.

SEVERAL MEMBERS. Go on.

Mr. BELT. I am one of those who think that the custom of administering oaths is an impolitic process in the establishment of governments. It is as well because the practice is useless in itself and unnecessary, as because, on the other hand, in its practical operation it is liable in most cases to lead to positive abuse. All citizens in a free community, by the very fact of their citizenship, owe a duty to the State, to which nothing can be superadded by the imposition of an oath. Under God there is no higher duty to be performed in this world by any man living in the commonwealth, than the common duty which each one knows and feels, independent of all extraneous considerations, that he owes to the common weal. So that when a man is called by the vote of his fellow-citizens in a free State to exercise and execute the duties of a public position, I hold that the obligation which the nature of his connection with the community imposes upon him, ought to be a sufficient guaranty among men of moral character that he will execute those duties to the best of his ability, independent of any factitious obligation which the imposition of an oath may be supposed to carry with it.

In corroboration of that theory this further view may be taken. Any man who is competent to discharge the duties of a public position, any man who is honest enough to be invested with the exercise of them, will discharge them as well without an oath as with one. A good man will execute his duties properly, promptly, and with integrity. A man on the other hand who does not intend to ex-